

### ***The Hill Newspaper***

By Rep. Dan Lungren (R-Calif.)

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Although much has been said about President Barack Obama's State of the Union address, buried deep within the text were words that auger a potential battle comparable to the stimulus package, cap-and-trade and healthcare.

The president observed that " ... we should continue the work of fixing our broken immigration system - to secure our borders, enforce our laws and ensure that everyone who plays by the rules can contribute to our economy and enrich our nation."

While there is likely to be overwhelming public support for border enforcement, beyond that a very different reaction should be expected. In fact, that is the probable reason for this lexical ambiguity, which actually translates into the president's previous call for a "path to citizenship" for those in our country illegally. After all, as the president revealed with respect to the healthcare legislation, the real issue comes down to how it's explained. The immigration issue might prove to be an even tougher sell. Trying to explain how rewarding those who didn't play by the rules is tantamount to treating fairly those who actually played by the rules would require the same deft rhetorical skills as selling the idea that a massive expansion of government involvement in the healthcare system will save us money.

Let me be clear: I have been working on various aspects of our immigration challenges for parts of three decades. I understand as well as most the need to address this multifaceted problem.

However, at a time when unemployment in parts of my congressional district is above 15 percent, it is simply not a friendly environment for anything that might be reasonably considered amnesty. The problem is that the public has caught onto the fact that once you get past the terminology, the real issue comes down to how we are going to deal with the 10 million-plus people here illegally. And the "path to citizenship" language or its equivalent unfortunately suggests the idea of preferential treatment - that is, cutting into line to obtain the most precious gift - U.S. citizenship. This is simply not a debate that in any way fits with what is going on in the

rest of the country outside the Beltway. Trying to explain to a constituent who is out of work or who just received a foreclosure notice that humanitarian magnanimity should be extended to millions of illegal aliens and their relations located elsewhere is all but certain to encounter a hostile reception.

Yet, the president's remarks concerning the need to enforce our immigration laws present us with an opportunity to work together on an issue where there is a broad public consensus.

I believe timing is crucial in politics - and public policy making. In a real sense this is the lesson of Massachusetts, New Jersey and Virginia. This administration started down a wrong path by focusing on things that are not foremost on the mind of the American people.

It is clear to me that the major flaw in existing law is the absence of a workable employment verification system in the employer sanctions framework. Those who come here in violation of our immigration laws come here primarily to find work. Ironically, this has been confirmed during the current recession by evidence that some have returned to their countries of origin because they were unable to find work in the United States. The fundamental premise is that if we are to be successful in demagnetizing the attraction of unlawful employment within this country, we must adopt a reliable system of verifying that job applicants are who they say they are and that they are eligible to work here.

As a starting point we should begin with a consideration of the E-Verify system. Although voluntary, this employment verification system based upon Social Security and Homeland Security Department databases is foundational for further reform. The Obama administration is to be commended for applying the system to government contractors. Although its critics dispute the program's accuracy, let's work together to make whatever changes are necessary to ensure that it is successful. There are different proposals out there that should be getting the attention of the Congress. Although we may decide to address the immediate challenge with intermediate measures, as someone who also serves on the Homeland Security Committee it is my conviction that our ultimate objective must be to adopt a biometric identification system. We must take advantage of the best technologies available to us to ensure that a workable system is put in place that is user-friendly to employers and most likely to end the unlawful-employment magnet.

In conjunction with continued growth in the Border Patrol - it has more than doubled in the last 10 years - such action provides the most likely chance of success in regaining control over our

borders. It also is most likely a sure bet to reassure the American people that we care about things that are important to them.

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